

NIGHT WITH ST. NICK

Being the Experiences of Jones,
the Reporter.

WHIRLEDVR S ROOFS

Dizzy Ride Through Space, Behind a String
of Fleet-footed Reindeer, With One
Mr. Kris Kringle and What
Came of It.

Obejyful Jones, the reporter, was busy every day in the week, but never so busy as on Saturday. On that day, in addition to his usual routine, he had to get in his "specials" for the Sunday edition, and, as Obejyful was wont to defer the task of tackling that work from day to day, the wind-up of the week invariably found him struggling desperately with his accumulated assignments.

This particular day had been an unusually laborious one with the procrastinating Jones, but by an almost superhuman effort he had turned in his six columns of "copy" to the city editor and only one more story remained when the supper hour came round. It was an advance write-up of a prospective sporting event of more than ordinary importance.

The reporter sat at his desk, deeply engrossed in studying the records of the athletes who were to compete in the forthcoming world's championship contest. In the garish disk of light cast upon his desk by the shaded incandescent globe he had spread out his reference statistics. His soul was burrowing in the past glories that formed the records of the respective "entries."

Only the click of the religious reporter's typewriter, hammering out the notes for the church news column, disturbed the quiet of the local room. Weary, stiff-fingered and heavy-eyed Obejyful dived and scribbled alternately. On and on he pushed his pencil sheet after sheet until—until his pencil stopped suddenly and the writer, upon examining the map before him, discovered that he had actually finished the story without being himself aware of it.

"That's odd," thought Jones. "Never had anything like this happen to me before. Can't understand how."

The voice of the city editor broke in upon his reflections.

"Mr. Jones," said that functionary, "I want a two-column story on how the streets look like Christmas eve night. See what you can make out of the appearance of the store windows, the crowds around the hotels, the throng of pedestrians and shoppers, the tin horn and firecracker racket, and all that sort of thing. Get it in before one o'clock and try and make it picturesque."

The reporter was still in a brown study over the remarkable phenomenon of his sporting story finishing itself of its own volition and the city editor's speech failed to reach him comprehensively.

"Beg pardon, sir, speaking to me?" he asked, feeling his chair and facing a stern-visaged man who had addressed him. Whereupon the local editor repeated himself, with what seemed Jones unnecessary emphasis and exclamation. Then Obejyful arose obediently, donned his drab overcoat and, having hung his horn-handle cane in the crook of his left arm and sallied forth, murmuring inwardly against the necessity for stories that a fellow didn't feel like writing and couldn't write decently even if he did.

The odd appearance of Washington avenue startled him as he thrust his nose out into the crisp December air. "Holy Moses!" he exclaimed, this is the quietest Saturday night I ever saw in Newport News. It can't be more than 9 o'clock and it looks like 3:30 on an ordinary Sunday morning. He stood a moment in front of the office and looked up and down the street. Not an animate thing could he discern within his range of vision. The cars had stopped running, the stores were all closed, even the restaurants were shut up as tight as wax. Peering down towards Bar Harbor he observed, to his utter astonishment, that there was not a sign of life visible even that usually active locality. The sound of his own footsteps on the sidewalk reverberated with astonishing clamor.

Obejyful looked up at the brilliant moon that floated in the heavens and at the myriad stars that winked indecorously down at him and bethought him to consult his watch.

Yes, it was early. Only a few minutes after 9. "Well, I'll swear," gasped the reporter, and had he not been brought up in the path of rectitude he might have carried out his throat. He proceeded up the street, sorely troubled in mind.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," he groaned, "but if somebody hasn't tapped me on the poll with a section of lead pipe, I'm a good deal worse off than I think I am." At the corner of Twenty-eighth street he was suddenly confronted by a queer looking old gentleman, who seemed to rise out of the earth.

"Hello, Obejyful Jones," said this party familiarly. "How do you think you feel?" The reporter found himself looking into the face of a round-cheeked, white-haired old fellow, with a pair of unusually bright eyes that twinkled mischievously at him. Obejyful halted abruptly.

"This is odd, decidedly odd," he murmured, stepping back in alarm. This queer old geezer wasn't here a moment ago. No, I'm an Indian if he was. Then he observed that the oddity of the mysterious individual's appearance extended to his dress. The venerable party was robed in a big bearskin ulster that fell almost to the heels of his heavy, thick-soled, broad-toed boots, while the sealskin cap that encased his head was pulled down half over his eyes. Coarse knit-wool mittens covered the ample hands that were thrust into the pockets of his immense ulster. The reporter gazed upon the figure in front of him in undisguised amazement.

"Hello, Obejyful Jones," repeated the antique looking old party again. "If I were you I wouldn't stare at a person in that manner. It's rude, unpardonably rude. Does your grand-mother's cat play on the jewsharp?"

the compliments of the season; but it appears to me that you are unduly familiar. From the way you have burrowed into that Klondike I judge that with all your flippancy, you are not so "Fudge," retorted the other, impatiently. "Fudge and fiddlesticks, I'm serious."

"We'll change the subject, if it's all the same to you," said Jones, dryly. "What have you got to offer as a substitute?"

"Well, as you have the advantage of me, you might tell me your name," suggested the reporter.

"Of course I might," argued the old fellow.

"You haven't asked me?" was the retort, and the old man laughed as if he were enjoying himself immensely.

"Then what is it?" demanded the reporter tartly.

The queer old fellow obviously found intense amusement in the young man's discomfiture. He relapsed into another fit of mirth, his corpulent body shaking like a huge chuck of jelly. "It might be Smith," said he, "and it might be Jenkins, but it isn't either of them."

"My name is Kringle—Kris Kringle," continued the patriarchal wag. Some-times they call me Santa Claus and again I am known as St. Nick. I often irreverently abbreviated to St. Nick. Put I like Kringle best. Just call me Kris and we'll let it go at that."

"So you're the original Kris Kringle, eh?" queried the reporter. "Do you expect me to believe that? Well, I don't. I think you're a fossilized fraud, my ancient, that's my candid opinion of you." Again the old man was convulsed with laughter. "I'll change your opinion for you," said he, throwing his arm suddenly about the shoulders of Obejyful. The next instant the reporter found himself whisked through the air, high above the streets, with the old gentleman's arm still encircling his body. They alighted in the tower of the courthouse building, where, to the infinite surprise of the newspaper man, he was dragged into a sleigh, which stood waiting there with a score of immense wheels of great beauty in harness and bells. He observed for the first time, too, that the snow was falling in big flakes and the house tops were covered with more than a foot of the white mantle. Before he had time to comprehend more, his companion had seized the lines and they were spinning the sleigh through the air at a dizzy speed. Presently the door slackened their pace and Obejyful summoned up his courage enough to stammer in the old man's ear, "I owe you a thousand apologies, sir." The merry old fellow gave vent to a roar of laughter that rang out louder than the chorus of bells that jangled from the trappings of his fleet-footed steeds. "Not one," said he, "I never expected you to believe me. Grown folks haven't any faith in me, anyhow. And yet I often do 'em a good turn. Now, I knew you were out for a story tonight and I took it into my head to help you. Isn't this jolly good weather?" he said abruptly, changing the subject and he pulled off his fur cap and shook an inch of snow from it.

"It is remarkable weather to say the least," answered Obejyful. "I saw only a sign of snow half an hour ago and yet from the appearance of the roof I judge that it must have been snowing hard for several hours."

"Not a bit of it," said Mr. Kringle. "It only looks that way to you, because you're in my company. While you're with me, Mr. Jones, you are privileged to see many things as I see them. For me to travel over my circuit without a foot of snow on the roofs and more falling would be a sorry breach of etiquette on my part and contrary to all Yuletide traditions. So whether the snow is in the streets or not on Christmas Eve night is a matter of little moment to me."

"Are you out on business tonight?" asked Obejyful.

"Turn your head and look at the cargo I've got aboard. Do you think I'd carry a load like that around if I were not?"

The reporter timidly glanced behind him, and wondered how the huge mountain of good things that rose up from the sleigh to a height of twenty feet in the air could have possibly escaped his notice when he entered the vehicle. But he saw a night of revels as he was beginning to take them as the came, with comparative composure.

The rotund and jovial Mr. Kringle chuckled audibly as he observed the curiosity his young associate evinced in the articles. There were toys, bonbons, jewelry, fire arms, ornaments of rare and costly design. Things of every description were to be seen in the gleam of the reindeer's up in the sleigh. Such a quantity and variety of articles calculated to excite the cupid of little boys and girls he had never before dreamed of. "These things," said the master of the reindeer, pointing his whip-staff at the pile, "are to be distributed in the early hours of the morning, before daybreak. The trip I'm on just now is a new idea of mine. I'm going to visit the grown folks. That's why I've taken you along, for my dealings with the kids is an old story to the world."

On the parapet of a house Mr. Kringle drew rein and the deer came to a halt with much churning of the sleigh. The jolly driver leaped briskly out at the same moment. "We make the first stop here. It is the house of a lawyer friend of mine, who hasn't had a case in six months. Let me see—what shall we give the limb of the law? Ah! here's the very object, exclaimed Mr. Kringle, diving into a high chest that he had dragged from under the seat of the vehicle.

"What is it?" asked the reporter, who was now taking a lively interest in what was going on around him. "What is it?" he queried, rubbernecking to get a glimpse of the bundle the chuckling Kringle had extracted from the chest.

"A suit," was the reply of the master of the reindeer, as he leaped nimbly to the chimney top, executed a pigeon-wing on the narrow ledge of brick and then dangled before the eyes of the reporter for inspection a neat cutaway coat and vest and a pair of accompaniments. "A suit for the lawyer man," laughed the merry Kringle, "he hasn't entered a new suit in a long time, but tomorrow he will be the most exquisite thing that ever came down the avenue." With that he threw a flip and disappeared head first into the chimney.

He was back in a moment, empty handed, but chuckling. "He shouted as he bounded into the seat beside the reporter, and they swept away through space like the wind. Obejyful had scarcely settled himself in the seat when another stop was made. "Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Kringle, leaping over the side of the sleigh. "Here you, Mr. Jones. I'll thank you to hand me those three books near your elbow. Thanks. Now for another delivery. Lawyer this time, too?" asked Obejyful, taking out his note book and hastily scratching some memoranda of the happenings of the night.

"Guess again," said Mr. Kringle. "It's a coal dealer this time." "But these are law books," said Obejyful, examining them critically.

"Suppose they are," retorted Mr. Kringle. "I guess I know my business young man. They're altogether apropos. See! one is Blackstone, another is Coke and the third is Littleton." And again

the master of the reindeer danced gleefully from the roof into the chimney, leaving the reporter to reflect upon and record what he had seen and heard.

Two minutes more and the sleigh with its occupants was again whizzing on its way, the old man ever and anon exploding into fits of merriment, without any apparent cause whatever.

"Whoop-ee-ee!" said he, pulling up the deer on the next roof. "You're an incomprehensible old fellow," remarked the reporter, drawing out his note-book. "I shan't try to understand you any more."

"Just so," laughed Mr. Kringle, exultantly. "I should be sorry if you could. Just you keep your eyes open and your pen a-busy. As you see, we're down town now on Twenty-third street. This is a ham. An actor lives here—a very bum actor," saying which he jumped into the chimney with the ham.

Out he came again in a moment, and in a cloud of snow, thrown up by the heels of the deer they were whisked away.

Later on, when the sleigh drew up on the roof of a hotel, the old gentleman leaped out with a peculiar looking appliance which, he explained, was to be a boon to the hotel clerk, a friend of his who lived there. "This house," said he, "is a favorite with folks from the corner of this little instrument, with which I propose to lift a world of anxiety from the clerk's breast, is a jax-proof gas burner. No matter how hard they blow, the light will not go out until the gas is turned off."

At the next stopping place, the home of a telegraph messenger boy, he left a beautifully bound copy of "Bunco Bill's Biggest Brace Game; or The Twin Champions of Blue Blazes' Camp."

Again the sleigh sped onward and again it stopped.

"This is the home of a brewer," said he. "How does this beautiful motto suit his sitting room?" He displayed a sign reading: "A beer in the hand is worth two in the bushel—B. B. 'Aha! here is another place for one of my handsomely executed motto cards," said Kris at the next roof. Here we will leave this one. The reporter copied the noble sentiment it displayed—"Be a Man"—into his note book and then asked "for whom?"

"President of the New Woman's Club," the facetious Kris did make reply and forthwith leaped into the curling smoke of the chimney.

And so it went on for an hour longer, the reporter and his merry old companion whirling dizzily through space from house top to house top, leaving a memento of their visit at each stopping place.

Just as Obejyful was beginning to tire of the experience they alighted on a dingy roof in the suburbs of the city and the old gentleman handed him the reins with the remark: "Our last call for the night, the grown up folks. This is a bag of chestnuts, chipped by the old gentleman as his round little paunch shook with unexpressed glee, and this," pointing downward, "is the abiding place of a fellow who makes saucy jokes about me at Christmas. He is while you fellows call a funny paragraph."

While Obejyful was awaiting the return of Mr. Kringle he became sensible of a sudden drowsiness coming upon him. He yielded to an irresistible impulse to close his eyes. When he opened them again he found himself staring at the corner of Twenty-eighth street and Washington avenue. To his surprise he saw the shop windows ablaze with lights and the avenue looking just as it usually appeared on Saturday nights. The passing crowds, however, seemed more numerous than usual. The sidewalks were alive with a seemingly endless procession of Christmas buyers.

He uttered a cry of astonishment, and marvelling greatly, pulled out his watch. The hands indicated the hour of 12.

"Merry Christmas to you and many happy returns," said a familiar voice in his ear, and turning his head he found the companion of his night's adventures standing at his side.

"Hello, old man," shouted an acquaintance, who was passing along. Obejyful recognized him with the greatest relief imaginable.

"I say, hold on a minute," he shouted to the young man who, having saluted him, was now making off hastily.

"See you later, old chap," said the acquaintance dodging into the crowd. Obejyful somewhat chagrined, was about to acknowledge the redoubtable old gentleman's good wishes, when he caught the eye of an intimate friend, a member of his lodge, coming towards him through the crowd.

"Hello, old chap," said this young man stopping abruptly within a few feet of the pair on the curbstone. "Who's your friend, say, where did you meet him, eh? If I were you I'd ask him to take a chance on a razor. Those Svengalis of his will have a desperate struggle with the wind this winter, I think yes."

For the first time Obejyful noticed, with mortification that the red-faced old gentleman, in his heavy boots and rusty great coat presented an appearance anything but conventional. Mr. Kringle, too, was staring in the faces of everyone passing and he moved about as awkwardly as a rheumatic farmer. He was altogether undesirable company.

The old fellow stood closely beside him, every now and then asking some stupid question about the people who passed them, fifty per cent. of whom were known to the reporter.

Obejyful, half dazed as he was became painfully conscious of the fact that the passing throng were gazing curiously at himself, and the fraekish Kringle.

They were laughing at them, too, and dozens of his friends were passing him by unnoticed, after ascertaining that the old fellow, was in his company.

"I say, Uncle Kris," said he, dragging the old fellow into the less prominent thoroughfare of Twenty-eighth street. "Suppose we go down this way."

"I'm awfully obliged to you and hope to show my gratitude at some future time, but I must really get back to the office."

"I'd rather remain in Washington avenue and see the sights," objected the old man, peevishly.

"But, can't you see we're attracting the attention of everybody on the street?" remonstrated the reporter, testily.

"Well, what of it?" retorted the old fellow. "Let 'em stare. They ought to expect me this time of the year, and if they don't like me, they can go hang. Who cares?"

"Suppose I leave you here then to enjoy yourself?"

"Oh, no; not at all. You can't leave me here. You must stay with me. I am only permitted to remain on earth when in company with a mortal. If you go away I must fly into the air, whether I like it or no. Now is the chance for you to show your appreciation of me if you care to. If you don't I'll take you up on the roofs again."

At this moment a bevy of young girls, among whom the reporter to his dismay discerned his own girl, turned the corner. They carried in their rifles of Christmas things and were on their way home from a late shopping tour. As Obejyful and the old man confronted them a chorus of laughter went up from

the girls. The idol of Obejyful's soul, catching sight of him, gave a little shriek of surprise, looked upon him in disgust and passed him by without a word, followed by her friends. This was the last straw.

"See here, old fellow," said Obejyful, somewhat roughly, "this will never do; don't you know you can't stay here."

"So ho! then you're ashamed of my company, are you? I thought so," said the old man, reproachfully.

"Not at all, my dear sir; you are mistaken; indeed you are," stammered the confused reporter. "But you must see that you are making us both ridiculous."

"That's just like you selfish mortals, all of you are ungrateful, and wanting in appreciation for your betters. Maybe it's the cut of my clothes they don't like. Is that it? Well, I can't wear a high hat and a claw hammer coat. You ought to understand that. Tell me, is it the clothes?"

"Well, I must admit that your Klondike is a rather ungainly affair, and that a shave and a hair cut would improve your appearance, to say nothing of your boots. A few other minor details, too, make you unpleasantly conspicuous," replied Obejyful.

"And you never noticed all this until I brought myself down to your level, simply to take a look at your citizens? But of course you didn't. I closed out the town from your sight the moment you started from the office. If you had seen the crowd we attracted while you were talking to me at Twenty-eighth street and the avenue you would probably have given me the shake then and there. But you didn't. Ho! ho! ho! I surrounded you with a mist that obscured from your view every living thing but myself."

"Then, you've deceived me, and have no further claim on my courtesy," groaned Obejyful.

"How the deuce shall I explain it to the boys," he asked himself. I can't tell them that the old man was the real original Santa Claus. They'd simply give me the grand ha! ha! only I'm afraid of him, I'd punch the stuffing out of him and run for it."

He regarded the odd-looking creature at his side with a look of intense hatred. He thought of the Old Man of the Sea in the story of Sinbad, the Sailor, and wondered if he were destined to find in the redoubtable Santa Claus the same sort of an incubus as the old fend who fastened himself upon Sinbad. Mr. Kringle was shaking his sides with laughter. "Come," said he. "I've entertained you and I know you'd like to reciprocate. Bring me around to your club and introduce me and we'll call it quits."

The reporter could no longer restrain his wrath. The very thought of such a proposition incensed him so much that he momentarily forgot his dread of the old man. "Never," he exclaimed. "Never, not if I die for it."

"If you refuse, I'll kick you all over the street," retorted Mr. Kringle, angrily. "You are an ungrateful wretch and deserve a good kicking, anyway. I'll just teach you a lesson." So saying he jumped quickly behind the reporter, and administered a terrific kick to the unhappy Obejyful, which woke him up.

"Mr. Jones," the city editor, was saying, "You haven't started out yet on that story I told you about five minutes ago. Rush it and try and make it interesting."

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